

# Montgomery Parks to Test 'Natural Weed-Killer' As Pesticide Debate Set to Resume



## Parks has said pesticide ban would hurt its ability to keep some playing fields in shape

By Aaron Kraut

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The two soccer fields at Timberlawn Local Park are part of a Montgomery Parks pilot project on turfgrass treatment

Via Montgomery County

As the debate over a proposed pesticide ban gets set to resume, Montgomery Parks has enlisted a group of University of Maryland turf scientists to help it test treatment options on a pair of heavily used local soccer fields.

The parks department, which [has asked for an exemption](#) from County Council President George Leventhal's proposed ban on chemical lawn care treatments, started the study this month on the two soccer fields at North Bethesda's Timberlawn Local Park.

Jody Fetzer, green management coordinator for Montgomery Parks, said the two fields are a prime example of local recreational fields that see very heavy use from sports leagues with participants of all ages and types.

The fields can be rented for \$7 an hour and are typically [aerated](#) in the spring and fall.

"When they're so heavily played, it's like those feet beat them to death," Fetzer said.

Fetzer said the parks department oversees more than 280 local and neighborhood park fields around the county, some of which receive occasional spot treatments of chemical-based pesticides or herbicides. Fetzer said some fields are rarely treated with chemicals, owing in part to the fact that the parks department staff has such a long list of fields to maintain.



At Timberlawn, University of Maryland scientist Dr. Thomas Turner and parks department staff Kevin May and Michael Clements will divide each of the two fields into eight rectangular blocks.

Four blocks of each field won't be treated with pesticides, receiving only aeration and seeding.

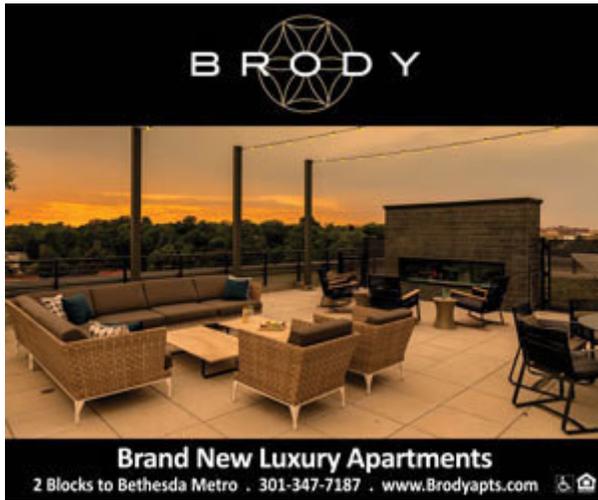
On the upper field, the other four blocks will receive the department's standard integrated pest management treatment, which could include a mixture of aeration, seeding and the application of the type of pre-emergent herbicides that Leventhal's bill would ban.



The herbicides would target goose grass and crabgrass and a post-emergent herbicide would target knotweed, plantain and other broadleaf weeds.

On the lower field, the remaining four blocks will be treated with an iron-based herbicide [that pesticide opponents claim](#) works as a "natural selective weed control."

Fetzer said it's her understanding that the use of the iron-based herbicide, called Fiesta Iron HEDTA, would be permitted if the county's pesticide ban is passed in its current form.



^ NORTH ^

Upper Field (on hill) 195' x 325'

No Pesticide	Standard Park IPM
Standard Park IPM	No Pesticide
No Pesticide	Standard Park IPM
Standard Park IPM	No Pesticide

Lower Field 185' x 312'

No Pesticide	Fiesta Iron HEDTA herbicide
Fiesta Iron HEDTA herbicide	No Pesticide
No Pesticide	Fiesta Iron HEDTA herbicide
Fiesta Iron HEDTA herbicide	No Pesticide

*Layout of Montgomery Parks' turfgrass pilot project at Timberlawn Local Park in North Bethesda. Credit: Montgomery Parks*

Leventhal has maintained that the parks department shouldn't be exempt from the bill, which as proposed would exempt golf courses and major agricultural uses.



At a council public hearing on the legislation in January, Montgomery Parks Director Mike Riley said the department has already cut back on pesticide use, but banning the use of pesticides would hurt the county's frequently used fields.

"We would expect declines in field quality and turf cover, higher maintenance costs, frequent field closures for renovation and decreased support in revenue," Riley told the council.

The department also maintains a group of higher-quality fields known as regional and recreational fields. Those must be rented at rates ranging from \$17 to \$40 per hour.



Fetzer said Shirley Povich Field at Cabin John Regional Park, home to the Georgetown University baseball team and Bethesda Big Train summer league team, requires a higher degree of care and more spot chemical treatments.

There have been no treatments applied at the Timberlawn pilot project yet. Fetzer said she expects the project to take two years to produce any useful results the department could incorporate into its procedures.

The council's Transportation & Environment Committee is set to resume its discussion of the pesticide bill June 15.



Two weeks ago, after the council entered a recess, council member Roger Berliner proposed changing the legislation to remove the outright ban and insert provisions including a requirement that pesticide applicators report how much they apply yearly in the county.

Leventhal [told Bethesda Beat he disagreed](#) with Berliner's proposal.

With the council back in session Monday, [Leventhal told reporters](#) making progress on the pesticide bill is one of his major priorities for the summer.

